

Introduced by Senator Alarcon

April 21, 2003

Senate Joint Resolution No. 15—Relative to the federal poverty level.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SJR 15, as introduced, Alarcon. Federal poverty level.

This measure would memorialize the President and Congress of the United States to ensure that the United States is working to meet the basic needs of all families, begin a process to better calculate the federal poverty level, and use existing models to calculate poverty, including geographical costs of living.

Fiscal committee: no.

- 1 WHEREAS, The federal poverty level was created in the 1960's
- 2 to determine the number of people living in poverty; and
- 3 WHEREAS, The Census Bureau notes that the federal poverty
- 4 measure is a statistical yardstick rather than a complete description
- 5 of what people and families need to live; and
- 6 WHEREAS, The federal poverty level is calculated by
- 7 multiplying basic food consumption by three; and
- 8 WHEREAS, The federal poverty level implies a demographic
- 9 model of a two-parent family with a stay-at-home wife; and
- 10 WHEREAS, The federal poverty level does not include the
- 11 different cost of living across states, counties, and cities; and
- 12 WHEREAS, The cost of housing, health care, transportation,
- 13 child care, and essential services, such as water, electricity,
- 14 telecommunications, and gas, are not included in calculating the
- 15 federal poverty level; and



1 WHEREAS, The current 2002 federal poverty level is defined
2 by a family unit of one with an income of \$8,860, a family unit of
3 two with an income of \$11,940, a family unit of three with an
4 income of \$15,020, and a family unit of four with an income of
5 \$18,100; and

6 WHEREAS, The 2000 federal census reports that 14 percent of
7 Californians live at the federal poverty level; and

8 WHEREAS, Californians for Family Economic
9 Self-Sufficiency (CFESS), a project of the National Economic
10 Development and Law Center, has developed the self-sufficiency
11 standard that uses major budget items and varies geographically;
12 and

13 WHEREAS, It is in the best interest of the state to address
14 poverty issues, and, to the extent possible, eliminate poverty; and

15 WHEREAS, A more accurate calculation of poverty would
16 assist in California's effort to end poverty; and

17 WHEREAS, Many California families are struggling with
18 inadequate resources to meet their families' basic needs, yet many
19 of these families are not designated as poor by either official
20 poverty guidelines or by assistance programs. Although often
21 described as "falling between the cracks," this group is neither
22 small nor marginal as that phrase suggests, but, rather, is a
23 substantial proportion of our society, and yet little is known about
24 them; and

25 WHEREAS, A more accurate calculation of the federal poverty
26 level would redirect more federal funds to states; now, therefore,
27 be it

28 *Resolved by the Senate and Assembly of the State of California,*
29 *jointly,* That the Legislature respectfully memorializes the
30 President and Congress of the United States to do all of the
31 following:

32 (1) Ensure that the United States is working to meet the basic
33 needs of all families.

34 (2) Begin a process to better calculate the federal poverty level
35 to ensure that all states receive an adequate representation of the
36 number of families who are struggling to meet their basic needs.

37 (3) Use existing models to calculate poverty, including
38 geographical costs of living that take into account expenses such
39 as housing, child care, health care, and transportation; and be it
40 further



1 *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of
2 this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United
3 States, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Majority
4 Leader of the Senate, and to each Senator and Representative from
5 California in the Congress of the United States.

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